

St. Ninian's Parish Church
Sunday 19th January 2020
John 1: 29 – 42; John 1: 29 - 42

'Come and see,'¹ said Jesus to Andrew and another person, unnamed, who would become his disciples. 'Come and see, he replied' to them when they asked him where he was staying. John the Baptist had pointed them in Jesus' direction, 'Where are you staying, they asked Jesus. "'Come and see', he replied."

'Come and see,' is also the answer that the city of Edinburgh has been giving to the world for many years when people ask where they will stay on their holidays. Come and see our city. And, people have been coming to Edinburgh on holiday in their millions, 4.3 million last year, to see our beautiful city, to take part in our lively celebrations, and to be entertained by our famous festivals. So many people have been coming to see, to take part, and to be entertained that tourism in this city has become not just something for us to celebrate, but also a problem to be solved.

At the end of last year, the City Council proposed a draft 10-year strategy aimed at ensuring tourism continues to be, in their words, "a benefit, not a burden" to the people of Edinburgh. With millions of people coming every year, the Council recognises that tourism in Edinburgh needs as much management as it does drivers for growth so that the number and the needs of tourists doesn't conflict with the equally growing numbers and needs of those who live in the city, its residents.

For tourists, Edinburgh is a good city to visit and in many, many ways tourists and tourism are good for the city, but tourists and residents are different groups of people. Tourists come and see the city for a short time and then leave, whereas residents come and stay, and build homes, find jobs, raise families, form long-term relationships, live their lives in the city.

One significant example of where the needs and the of experience of tourists and residents differ is over the nature of property. Tourists need somewhere to stay when they visit, particularly hotel rooms or the many short-term lets like those provided by the on-line booking platform AirBnB. However, residents require a more permanent property market. In Edinburgh where someone is staying tells you a great deal about their relationship to the city, whether they are a resident or a tourist. In Edinburgh where someone stays tells you a great deal about who that person is.

After John the Baptist pointed two of his disciples in the direction of Jesus, the first question they asked Jesus was, 'Where are you staying?' 'Come and see,' Jesus replied. Just as where someone stays in Edinburgh tells us much about their relationship to the city, these words from our Gospel reading this morning, and the words of Paul in our reading from the first letter to the Corinthians, tell us much about the relationship that Jesus wants people to have with him.

'Where are you staying,' asked the disciples. The word 'staying' is the same word that Jesus himself uses later in the Gospel of John, but which is commonly translated as 'abide,' 'Abide in me, and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me,'² says Jesus in chapter 15 of this Gospel.

By using this word 'abide', and by many other ways, Jesus made clear the type of relationship that he wanted to build with his disciples, the people of Israel, and indeed the whole world.

¹ John 1: 39

² John 15: 4

Abide is a word that suggests he wants a relationship with people that is less like tourism, and more like residential. Jesus calls people to be disciples by calling them to be residents, not tourists.

When Jesus replied to the two disciples' question about where he was staying by saying, 'Come and see,' he wasn't inviting them to come and take part in a celebration and then go home, or to be entertained at a festival and then go on to the next venue, or to briefly pause in order to snap a selfie with him. He was asking people then and now to set down roots, build a home, find a job, join a family, form relationships, learn a new language. In other words, to begin a new life.

In his first letter to the church in Corinth Paul wrote to the small group of believers there perhaps 20 years or so after the crucifixion of Jesus, making the same point. The letter goes on to lay out his advice to them as they build their Christian community. To introduce his letter, in the passage we read, he reminded the community who they are as Christians, and ends with a clear statement about their relationship to Christ and to each other.

'It is God himself who called you to **share** in the life of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord...',³ he wrote. As Christians we are called to share in the life of Jesus Christ our Lord, not visit the life of Jesus, or read a biography about the life of Jesus. Sharing in the life of Jesus Christ doesn't mean we just pop in and out, we are called to make a bigger commitment than that.

This call to abide and to share has many consequences. It means for example that Christian belief and experience is something that is likely to grow and change and develop and deepen over a long period of time, in the same way that residing in a city grows and develops and deepens a person's relationship with that city over a long period of time, rather than remaining as the fleeting, surface impression that a tourist encounters.

This call to abide and to share mean also that Christian faith is something that develops through relationships with other Christians. Whereas a tourist need never encounter anyone, far less a local, in order to have the full holiday experience, for a resident to truly feel they live in a city, they need to get to know the other people who live with them; make friends, build relationships.

This call to abide and to share - to deepen your involvement and develop relationships - is a significant reason why the Kirk Session here at St. Ninian's is considering taking on a commitment to form an overseas Twinning relationship with another congregation elsewhere in the world.

When we are very settled in our lives, very familiar with our congregations, and comfortable in our routines it is easy to think that what we do on a Sunday morning when we come to worship here is just one other thing in a busy diary.

But, the truth is that sharing in the life of Jesus Christ as we do as members of the church and worshippers on a Sunday morning is to do a lot more than that. It is to become a resident in the Christian community, to abide in Jesus Christ, and to recognise the ways that we are a part of a religion which spans the globe, has over two billion adherents, and thousands of years of history. This globe spanning, heavily populated, historical religion is like a city, and we are called to reside in it, not just visit when we feel like it.

³ 1 Cor 1: 9

If we as a congregation were enthusiastic for this Church Twinning exercise, then it would help us to understand ourselves as a church and as Christians more fully, more deeply, and in relationship to the diversity of people who make up the people of Christ. If in our city we took only an interest in our own local neighbourhood, only ever talked to people like us living next door to us, only ever spent our money in the local shops, how much poorer would our experience of Edinburgh be? If that is what we did, then whenever we went into the city centre, or elsewhere in Edinburgh, we would feel more like tourists than residents of our own city.

After Jesus had called Andrew and the other disciple to come and see where he was abiding, the Gospel reading tells us that they spent the rest of the day with him. Then, Andrew went to find his brother Simon and encouraged him to come and meet Jesus. That encounter between Jesus and Simon transformed Simon, so much so that he was given a new name, Peter. Jesus saw the man that Simon would become, if Simon shared his life with Jesus. Jesus knew Simon better than Simon knew himself.

Tourists to a city are rarely, if ever, transformed by their city-break experience. Tourists to a city rarely, if ever, discover something new about themselves through their sight-seeing. But, when someone moves to a city, buys a home, learns the language, starts a new life, meets new people in a place they had not lived before, much changes. They learn more about the people in that city, they discover more about the world around them, they understand points of view that are different from their own. They are transformed.

As people who are called to be followers of Jesus Christ, to be members of the worldwide communion of God's people, we are called to become residents and to abide in Christ. The more we come to see ourselves in this way, the more we will be transformed as people to live the full lives that Jesus Christ wanted us to live, and the more we will appreciate that the body of Christ understands us better than we understand ourselves.